

# Some Thoughts on Orthodoxy

by Dean Harvey

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I had an interesting phone call recently. Jay Grimstead, the Director of the Coalition on Revival (COR), called and asked me to get involved in a COR debate or discussion of three of the points of "Moral Government" theology. The three points were (1) the "limited foreknowledge of God", (2) the atonement of Christ, in whether or not it was a payment, and (3) the idea of an inherited sin nature. As our conversation continued, I asked him why he wanted this kind of debate. His reply was to the effect that over the years men who had differing views of the Bible had met together in councils to discuss and define "orthodoxy." He said that orthodoxy was normally defined by majority vote of those meeting together.

Orthodox is defined as "1 a: conforming to established doctrine especially in religion b: CONVENTIONAL..." and orthodoxy as "1: the quality or state of being orthodox 2: An orthodox belief or practice..."

I know the Bible, and I am basically familiar with church history. As I began to ponder the idea of orthodoxy, several things came to mind.

Firstly, every step forward which Israel or the church has ever taken has been with the opposition of the established orthodoxy of that time. In the northern kingdom of Israel in the time of Amos, the false religion of Israel, the "sin of Jereboam," had become entrenched as orthodoxy in spite of all God's efforts through His prophets. Later Jeremiah was God's voice as He brought judgment and dispersion to Judah because of its sin. In all of his ministry Jeremiah had to confront the orthodoxy of his time, which undergirded the status quo in Judah, for which God was bringing judgment. In the time of Jesus and the establishment of the New Testament church, their main opposition came not from the devil or sinners per se, but from those who were orthodox, who were entrenched in the seats of religious power. Three illustrations will suffice. (1) The power of the Jews in John 9:22 when even the parents of the blind man who was healed were afraid to speak for their son because "the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue." (2) The desperate effort of the orthodox Jews to discredit Jesus in the story of the woman taken in adultery which is recorded in John 8:2-11. (3) The vicious opposition of Saul, the representative of orthodoxy, to the spread of Christianity in the time preceding his conversion.

In church history, perhaps the greatest battle between entrenched orthodoxy and a giant step forward was the reformation under Martin Luther. It seems to be true that the group which actually wins the battle and overcomes the old orthodoxy, in just a few decades, becomes the new orthodoxy, and as such, becomes an enemy of change. Calvinism, a stream of the Reformation, became the new orthodoxy, and was confronted by Arminianism, which was condemned by the "orthodox" majority in the Synod of Dort in

1619. Later, in England, Anglicanism was the orthodox religious power, and in order to be free to follow their conscience in religious matters, the Pilgrims and Puritans left England and came to America to leave their imprint upon the very foundation of the United States. We all owe them a great debt.

Secondly, we could say that most, if not all, religious revivals have been in opposition to the entrenched religious orthodoxy of their particular time.

Thirdly, we who are Christians have a primary obligation to the Lord of the church to follow Him in obedience. He has given us the inspired Word of God as an absolute guideline, and He has given every Christian the Holy Spirit to indwell, guide and teach him. William Adams has said "In time, the Bible corrects most of the false, incomplete, and unbalanced interpretations of its content." Fourthly, this does not mean that we are all independent of what God has done through others in the church in the past. Perhaps the greatest statement of the way in which we all are indebted to those who have come before is the "hall of faith" in Hebrews 11. I believe that there is a hall of faith made up of those who have lived during the last 2000 years of church history. Praise the Lord for the contributions which the men and councils of the past have made to the church, and therefore to each one of us. But ultimately, the responsibility of the individual Christian is to seek the Lord, study the Bible for himself, obey what he knows to be true, maintain a clear conscience before the Lord, and if these bring him into opposition to what is orthodoxy from his own heritage and denomination, he is to let his light shine, and if need be, to come out of that particular orthodoxy. We in the United States are fortunate at this point in history in that we will not normally be burned at the stake, drowned, or even exiled because of our differences with orthodoxy. The judgments will be much more subtle.

Fifthly, much of that which passes as orthodoxy today is a hindrance to the ordinary Christian as he tries to live for Christ in this world. Much of it gives excuses for sin, when I can find no such excuses in the Bible. If I cannot help sinning, why should I feel guilty, or even try to obey God? If orthodoxy gives excuses for sin, then it will have to redefine the purpose for which Jesus came away from that stated in Acts 3:26, "...He sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Much of it claims that we cannot obey God, when the clarion call of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is to obey. Much of it tries to give God and "grace" all the credit for whatever happens, when Paul tells us in I Cor. 3:9 that "we are God's fellow workers..." I certainly believe in God and grace but I believe that much of what God wants accomplished in this world is not done because we are not fulfilling our responsibilities. God is fulfilling His responsibilities, and He is "not willing that any should perish." I hear over and over again in many different circles that "Salvation is all of God." It seems obvious to me that if salvation were all of God, everyone would be saved.

Of course, there are some good things about orthodoxy. We should not have to reinvent the wheel in every generation. The things which concern us all have been discussed ever since Christ established His church. And to me, the primary things revolve around the person of God, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and the purposes of God in

salvation. For those of us who include ourselves under the banner of "Moral Government," let us not allow anyone to intimidate us with the accusation that we are not orthodox. True orthodoxy has been defined in the gospel, and the Lord Jesus will judge our orthodoxy at the judgment seat of Christ. In the meantime, let us go into all the world, and make disciples of all nations.

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